

SMOOTH SUMAC

Rhus glabra L.

plant symbol = RHGL

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Ozarks Regional Herbarium

Alternate Names

Scarlet sumac

Uses

Ethnobotanic: This was a widely used species among Native American tribes. The uses included the making of a root and leaf tea to treat diarrhea, dysentery, and mouth/throat ulcers. The leaves of the plant were smoked for asthma. The blossoms were used by the Chippewa in a mouthwash for teething children. Comanche children enjoyed the sour acid taste of the fruits and leaves were added to tobacco for smoking by adults. Dye was also created from various parts of the smooth sumac. The fruits were used to make red dyes and the inner bark used to make yellow dyes.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov.

Description

General: Sumac Family (Anacardiaceae). Smooth sumac can be a shrub or small tree growing up to 3 meters in height. Smooth sumac forms thickets from root suckers. The stems and branches are hairless and covered with a whitish waxy coating. The leaves are alternate and pinnately compound (3-5 dm long). Smooth sumac has 11-31 leaflets that are lanceolate to oblong-lanceolate (7-9 cm long). The leaflets taper to a point at the tip and are rounded at the base. The margins are sharply serrated. The upper surface is dark green and lustrous. The lower surface is covered with a whitish waxy coating. Smooth sumac has a branched, racemose inflorescence with flowers maturing from the bottom up (10-25 cm long). The flowers have a greenish color. The drupes have a flattened-globe shape (3.5-4.5 mm long) and are covered with red, sticky hairs. The seeds are yellowish in color and smooth (3-3.5 mm long).

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: Smooth sumac is found in open woodlands, prairies, on dry rocky hillsides, and in canyons.

Adaptation

Smooth sumac vigorously resprouts from rhizomes following fire. The rhizomes are usually located between 3 and 12 inches below the soil surface and this may provide protection from heat during a fire.

Establishment

Propagation of smooth sumac can occur by use of seeds or root cuttings. Seeds germinate best when exposed to continuous light and alternating warm and cool temperatures. Smooth sumac grows best in poor, well-drained soils, with partial to full sun. However, smooth sumac is a hardy species and will tolerate many soil types including soil that is slightly saline.

Pests and Potential Problems

If grown in its native habitat and using a local seed stock, the smooth sumac should not be prone to debilitating pests or problems.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

These materials are readily available from commercial plant sources.

Control

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

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Prepared By:

Matthew D. Hurteau

USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center
c/o Environmental Horticulture Department
University of California, Davis, California

Species Coordinator:

M. Kat Anderson

USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center
c/o Environmental Horticulture Department
University of California, Davis, California

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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